

## [On the Radio]

November 8, 1938

Lula and Allison Sizemore

Longtown, N.C.

Farmers

Claude Dunnagan, writer

LIKE YOU HEAR ON THE RADIO Original names Changed names

Allison Morrison

Elsie Ollie

Uncle Jeff Uncle Hank

Tom Mallory Sam Hicklin

Longtown Shortridge

Hildreth Bernhard

Tommy Sammy

Joe Tom

Cook's Carson's

Irene Cook Amelia Carson

Lula Irma

LIKE YOU HEAR ON THE RADIO

"No, I don't mind tellin' you about me and Morrison and the young'uns. Won't you sit down. Ollie! Bring out another chair. We got company! People don't come around so often. Sometime Uncle Hank comes from across the creek to see us. We get sort of lonesome. I'm mighty glad to have somebody to talk to. I use to tell Morrison our lives would make a good true story—like you read in the magazines and hear on the radio—Ma Perkins and the others. Oh, yes! We got a radio - a battery set. You see, we ain't got no electric power. We listen to all the good stories and string music. Sometimes we buy things they sell on the radio - medicine and other things.

"I guess we been hard luck renters all our lives - me and Morrison both. They was ten young'uns in my family, and I was next to the youngest. We had it awful hard - I reckon my father was about the meanest there ever was - he used to beat me and run me out of the house, but I'd come back when he cooled off. It was his hot-headedness that ruined us. They was a neighbor, Sam Hicklin, that lived near us. His farm run next to ours, and one day he come over to the house and told my father that he was plantin' corn all the way over on his land, and he had better put up a fence and watch out. My father told him to tend to his own business and this made Sam mad. Next day, when my father went out 2 to work, he saw a big ditch cut right down through the middle of his corn-field. Old Tom was settin' on a fence watchin' him. They started cussin' and in a minute they was throwin' rocks at each other. Well, both of 'em got lawyers and took it to court. The judge divided the land halfway between the ditch and the end of the cornfield, but this didn't do any good, because when the case was settled, the lawyers' bills was so big they couldn't pay it. The lawyers got the farms and left Tom Mallory and us without anything. The lawyers sold our farm and we had to move out. That was when I was nineteen. We went to Yadkin County and rented an old rundown farm for a share of what we could raise. The crops wasn't any good that year, the landlord came and got what we had raised and had the

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auctioneers come and sell our tools and furniture. They was a bunch of people at the sale that day from all around. I was standin' there watchin' the man sell the things when I saw a good lookin' man in overalls lookin' toward me. He watched me all durin' the sale and I knew what he was thinkin'. That was the first time I ever saw [Allison.?] I reckon he fell in love with me right off, for we was married a few days later. Allison didn't have no true father. His mother wasn't married, and he was raised up by his kin folks. Then we moved to a little farm near Longtown, about ten miles away. The owner said we could have three-fourths of what we raised. The first two years the crops turned out pretty good so we could pay off the landlord and buy a little furniture... 3 a bed and table and some chairs. Then the first baby came on. That was Mildreth. He's out in the field workin' now, suckerin' tobacco.... By that time, we was able to get a cow, and that came in good, for the baby was awful thin and weak.

"After that, things didn't go so good. Another baby come on and we had our hands full takin' care of the two children and lookin' after the farm work. Then the second baby was four years old, he started gettin' pale and thin. We put him to bed one day because he looked so sick we thought he was goin' to die. We didn't call a doctor for a long while. You, see, we didn't have any money then, and we'd heard that the doctor up in town wouldn't come unless you had the money ready. But Allison said he didn't care, so one night after dark he started walkin' through the woods toward the highway. He caught a ride into town and about two hours later, him and the doctor drove up in the yard.

"When the doctor finished lookin' at the baby, he turned around with a worried look on his face and said he had meningitis. That was some kind of ailment that got in his back. The next, he got awful sick and when the doctor come again, my little boy had a stroke of infantile paralysis. He died the next day. After we had buried him up at the church cemetery, we went on with our work. There wasn't much we could do but try to forget about little Tommy. But we did love him so much. I go to his grave and put flowers on it every Sunday.

"The crops was comin' in and we had to work hard to get the tobacco suckered and cured before the market opened, or else we couldn't pay the landlord his share, come fall.

"Hildreth was only six, but he could help a lot, pullin' and tyin' the tobacco, and helpin' hang it in the barn. We got out more tobacco that year than any other, but when we took it to market in Winston, they wasn't payin' but about twelve cents a pound for the best grade, so when we give the landlord his share and paid the fertilizer bill, we didn't have enough left to pay the doctor and store bill. We didn't know what we was goin' to do durin' the winter. Allison had raised a few vegetables and apples, so we canned what we could and traded the rest for some cotton cloth up at the store so the children would have something to wear that winter. Allison got a job helpin' build a barn for a neighbor, but it didn't last but two days. The neighbor gave him two second hand pairs of overalls for the work.

"That was one of the hardest years we come to. Next spring, another baby was born. That made four. You see, we'd already had another one, a girl, before little Tommy died. This one was a boy. He was the strongest and healthiest one we'd had yet. I loved him so much, because I thought he would take the place of little Tommy. Just before he was one year old, Allison said we ought to bake a cake for his birthday. We thought we would. The day before his birthday, I was in the kitchen bakin' the cake and some pies, when I heard little Joe start cryin'.

I ran to see what was the matter, and he was layin' on the floor, all pale and sick lookin'. I put him in bed and ran out toward the field and called Allison....he was hoein' corn. When Allison looked at Joe, he said: "It looks like a bad spell. I'm goin' after the doctor." I'll never forget how scared I was while I waited for Allison to come back. I sat there beside little Joe holding a wet rag on his head, and prayin' he'd get well. I recollect how I prayed that night. I said, "Oh, God, please don't let him die like little Tommy. He's the only baby I've got."

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"Allison and the doctor came, little Joe was awful hot. The doctor looked at him a minute then turned around to me and Allison.

"He's been dead half an hour." I guess he must've died while I was prayin'.

"Next spring when we was plantin' tobacco, Allison got to leavin' home every night, and comin' in about midnight. I didn't know what he was doin' till one of the neighbors that live up the road tole me that he had seen Allison goin' up to the Cook's house every night. The Cook's didn't have any children but a girl named Irene cook lived with them. She was some kin to them. Irene was sixteen years old and pretty, too, but she had a bad name. A month after Allison started goin' up to her house, they ran off together. That was the first time I started gettin' relief from the government. They was a government woman that come around and gave orders for food and clothes, and sometimes we got a little money. I needed it awful bad, because with 6 Allison gone, they wasn't any way to feed the two children. I had to do most of the work in the field that summer, and sometimes I would go to the neighbors' house and wash for them for a piece of meat.

"Then, about two months after Allison and Irene ran off, the Sheriff down in the sandhills, in the eastern part of the state, found Allison and Irene livin' together. They brought Irene back home but they didn't get Allison. A month later, I was settin' in the kitchen sewin' when Allison walked in. He looked kinda' bad like he'd been hungry for a long time. He sat down in a chair in front of the fire, like he was awful tired and said to me:

"I been a damn fool, Lula. That crazy woman didn't want nothin' but my money. You ain't mad at me, are you, Lula?"

"I said: 'I ain't got no right to be mad now, Allison. You had your fling and done come home...We need you awful bad.. We got to get out and hoe in the tobacco tomorrow. You better get some sleep.

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"About six months later, Irene had a baby. Right off, she blamed it on Allison. When she took it to court, Allison denied it....said it was just as apt to be somebody else's baby. But the judge said he was guilty and told him to pay Irene fifty dollars. Allison didn't have any money then, so he went to jail and served twenty-one days. Accordin' to the law, he had payed his debt. That was the fourth baby Irene had.... all of 'em born out of wedlock. Only two of 'em are living now. She had 7 two by one man. I still can't believe Allison was the father of one of the children. Anyway, that's all in the past now, and today there's on better man than Allison. This year he gave a week's labor on the Methodist Church at Center. That was when they built a new part to it. All the men in the neighborhood that can't give money help on it. Allison has always give his share.

"Things are a lot better for the center today than in the past. It used to be we couldn't get enough to eat and wear. Now we got a cow, a hog, and some chickens. Allison bought a second-hand car and every Sunday afternoon we ride somewhere. It's the only time we ever get away from the home.

"The landlord gives us five-sixths of what we raise, so we get along pretty good when the crops are fair. Of course we have to furnish the fertilizer and livestock. This year we had seven barns of tobacco and four acres of corn. Wheat turned out pretty good too. We raised forty-three bushels, and I hear the price is going to be fair at the roller mill. I canned about all our extra fruits and vegetables. I reckon we still got about a hundred cans in the pantry.

"We never owned any land, but Allison and me just bought a house....it's the old Center school house down the road about two miles. We bought it from the county for \$270. We only got \$150 paid but we can pay the rest after next year's crop. They's only one thing bad about it though.... It's right next door to where Irene Cook lives....with her children. It's goin' to be 8 hard to face her after what happened between her and Allison. It'll take

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a lot of courage, I guess....more'n I've got. I don't think she'll attempt again, though....he's learned his lesson.

“Someday we hope to own our own land as well as the house. It might be a long time, but with the grace of God we'll get there. It seems like that man in Washington has got a real love for the poor people in his heart, and I believe it's due to him and his helpers that the poor renters are goin' to get a chance. We've got more hope now than we ever had before.

“I'm mighty glad you stopped to see us. Won't you come again? We'll be livin' in the new place then, I reckon....”